

Hobbies

Collector goes to the Olympics with his design for coin

By Roger Boye

A Michigan coin collector who saved for a month to buy his first commemorative half dollar in the 1970s soon will be immortalized on a special half dollar he helped to create.

Steven M. Bieda of Warren, Mich., has won \$2,500 from Uncle Sam in a national coin-design competition. Officials will use his drawing for the "tails side" of a copper-nickle half dollar—one of three Olympic commemorative coins to be issued by the U.S. Mint next year—and his initials will appear on the coin.

Bieda was in Washington earlier this month when Treasury Secretary Nicholas F. Brady unveiled the six top Olympic designs, one for each side of each coin. In all, the government re-

ceived 1,107 entries.

"At first I thought one of my obverse-side designs might do well," said Bieda, who made the maximum six submissions in the contest and was the only winner from the Midwest. "But I later thought there was something special about this one reverse—maybe it's the Latin motto."

Bieda's winning design shows a stylized Olympic torch and flame, an olive branch, and the words "citius, altius, fortius" for "faster, higher, stronger"—the Olympic motto.

"I had heard that the secretary of the Treasury was an educated man, and I thought he might like the Latin," Bieda said. The winning designs were picked by Brady in a judging process that included hobbyists and artists.

Bieda said he was pleased with

all six winning designs and described as "innovative" and "breathtaking" the heads side of "his" coin, created by William C. Cousins of the U.S. Mint's engraving staff. It shows a female gymnast imposed over a fragment of the American flag that covers the entire side of the coin.

Uncle Sam conducted the competition last spring following widespread criticism that two of the government's 1991 commemorative dollars were poorly done, in part because there was little time to work on the designs.

For recent coin programs, officials have considered drawings only from the mint's engraving staff or from a handful of private artists invited to make submissions; the last national competition was in the mid-1970s for the tails sides of Bicentennial quarters, halves and dollar coins.

Among other designs, Bieda said he admires the depiction of a colonial drummer boy on the Bicentennial quarter, which was created by Jack Ahr of Arlington Heights. Bieda began collecting coins as a youngster in the 1970s as an outgrowth of his interest in art.

"I bought a 'Red Book' and started saving coins from my paper route," Bieda said. His first purchase, after a lot of pennypinching, was a Lexington-Concord half dollar dated 1775-1925.

Bieda, 30, a law student at the University of Detroit, was the only amateur artist to win the competition. Although he still collects coins and has joined a few hobby organizations, he won't be spending any of his \$2,500 winnings on new rarities.

"It goes out tomorrow to pay bills, including my tuition," Bieda said on Oct. 9. But he can look forward to seeing his initials on the coin he helped create, just off the bottom of the stem of the olive branch.

Treasury officials are expected to produce the first Olympic coins in the next four months with mail-order sales starting early next year. Some of the profits from sales will go to the U.S. Olympic Committee for the training of U.S. athletes.

Besides Bieda and Cousins, other competition winners were John R. Deecken of Fairfield, Conn., a freelance illustrator and designer; Marcel Jovine of Closter, N.J., a sculptor; James M. Peed of Falls Church, Va., a U.S. Mint graphic artist; and James C. Sharpe of Westport, Conn., a freelance illustrator.